

in order to view the work objectively, Steiner proposes a creative response that approaches a work with the intention of creating from it a new work that is simultaneously analytical and imaginative. His proposal is based on a belief that each 'performance of a dramatic text or musical score is a critique in the most vital sense of the term; it is an act of penetrative response which makes sense sensible'.... A creative response 'makes sense sensible' by carrying out the 'potentialities of meaning' of the original work into a new work so that we once again may experience with all our senses and thereby more fully understand what was then and there but is here and now revealed anew. (p.257)

This *Annual* is a rich store of such creative responses to the work of Thomas Merton, not only illuminating his original work but revealing something new in the dialogue which Merton continues to generate amongst those 'readers who eventually get around to arranging their dislocated reflections on texts to which they feel compelled to respond' (p.258). Perhaps, as Kramer has said, published Merton commentators do fall 'within a fairly narrow spectrum', yet the skilled and responsible engagement with his writing, demonstrated through the best of *The Merton Annual*, reveals that fruitful work remains to be done.

Perhaps George Kilcourse was correct when he proposed that now is the time for Merton scholarship to 'try out [its] place in the forum that is less insular, more genuinely catholic' (TMA 16 (2003) 271). Is it possible that this fine vehicle for 'Studies in Culture, Spirituality and Social Concerns' might yet become that more deeply catholic forum?

Gary P. Hall

The ITMS is now offering The Merton Annual as part of an enhanced membership package.

Thomas Merton's Gethsemani: Landscapes of Paradise, photographs by Harry L. Hinkle, essay by Monica Weis SSJ (University Press of Kentucky, 2005), pp.157, ISBN 08131234888 (hbk) \$29.95

This is a wonderful book. As Jonathan Montaldo says in his introduction, it is 'a beautiful book with many windows'. Primarily, the reader is offered windows into the piece of land in Nelson County, Kentucky, which in 1848 became home to the Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani. The photographs of Harry Hinkle capture the beauty and the stillness of the rolling hills, the abbey, the surrounding fields and lakes, as well as the roads, paths and outbuildings around the monastery grounds. Alongside these there is a selection of Merton's own photographs, reminding us through this window as to how he himself responded with a camera to the landscape of Gethsemani. Interweaved with the photography, and quotations from Merton's writings, is

an extended essay by Monica Weis. This takes us from the week in the spring of 1941, when Merton made his first journey from upstate New York to Gethsemani, to that day of light snowfall, 17 December 1968, when he finally took 'his place beneath his beloved Kentucky clay'.

This volume achieves a well-judged balance in its marriage of image and text. Harry Hinkle not only follows in Merton's footsteps by walking the fields of Gethsemani with a camera, he also produces black and white pictures of similar clarity and precision. Indeed, if you browse through the book without reading the titles underneath each photograph it is easy to mistake Merton's pictures for those of Hinkle, and vice versa. Apart from the landscape, Hinkle relishes ordinary places and objects and so one finds here pictures with poetic titles such as 'a metal cup from the remains of old dinnerware', 'a gate in the enclosure wall near the abbey parking lot', 'a hawk feather lies on the road in McGuinty's Hollow' and 'a detail of the pebbles in the road near the hermitage'. This is photography, like Merton's, with a contemplative spirit.

Quite rightly, Hinkle has not ventured very far into the monastery itself. There are very few pictures of the monks or the monastery as clearly the aim is to engage with the geography of Gethsemani, the places where Merton worked, walked and prayed. This includes some moving photographs of the ruins of St Anne's, the small tool shed where Merton wrote and meditated, an example of how in this place, as in all places, time does not

stand still.

Monica Weis, who elsewhere has written on Merton's relationship with nature, explains in the first of her five short chapters how Merton's love of landscape, creation and the animal world can be traced back to his childhood. Weis outlines how Merton brought his Franciscan spirituality into his new life as a Trappist. He wrestled with a misplaced obligation to remain detached from nature before allowing it to be something which could help shape him. In his monastic training Merton was helped in his appreciation of the created order by his study of the church fathers, such as Thomas Aquinas and Bernard Clairvaux, as well as Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart and his wider reading in literature, poetry and anthropology. His spiritual life was formed not only by the discipline of prayer and the liturgical year but also by the rhythm of the seasons and work in the fields.

One of the key dates in Merton's relationship with Gethsemani was 27 June, 1949, when his abbot, Dom James Fox, gave him permission to take his prayer beyond the cloister and into the grounds of his monastery. This could only deepen Merton's relationship with his environment. 'It is important to know where you are put on the face of the earth', he wrote. Now he was to discover St Anne's with its 'doorway open to the sky', a place where he remembered his childhood in England and walks around Oakham.

Later on, we learn of Merton discovering favourite spots around Gethsemani for picnics with friends, of

him swimming in the lakes on the very edge of the monastery property, his reciting of the office in the woods, and his work as a monastery forester. All the while, Merton is also conscious of, and writing about, those who are eavesdropping on his solitude, the animals and birds, including hawk and deer. 'Perhaps unknowingly,' Weis writes, 'the deer symbolized for Merton the silence he longed for. Perhaps they were an icon of the immanence of God and grace freely given'.

The words and images in this book also encompass Merton's experience of the night, the stars, the snow, the wind, and – I am particularly happy to say – his love of the rain. Eventually, of course, we end up at Merton's hermitage, the place where the harmony he achieved with his natural surroundings flowed most fully into his integrated life of the spirit.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century there is a sense in which knowing Thomas Merton's reputation through the books and journals, his interest in global issues, and his contacts with people across the world, one can lose sight of the fact that first and foremost he was a monk of Gethsemani. This beautifully produced book brings us back to this fact, deepening our appreciation of the man and the place where he lived out his vocation. The vast majority of people who read Merton will never have the chance to visit the place he knew as home. For some time to come, this book, I suggest, may just be the next best thing.

Keith Griffin